Select Literary Devices

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Alliteration
Repeating the initial consonant sound in a series of words.
EXAMPLE: The stealthy serpent slithered silently.

Allusion
Mentioning a place, idea, or character from history or culture to invoke a characteristic of the reference.
EXAMPLE: My boyfriend, Lewis, is such a Romeo. (allusion to Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet)

Archetype
A symbol, character, or theme that appears in a wide range of works, often with universal meaning.
EXAMPLES: Symbols: sun (hope, life); water (rebirth)
Characters: hero, stepmother, healer, mentor, wise fool
Themes: quest, journey, redemption

Assonance
Repeating similar vowel sounds.
EXAMPLE: Sweet tea, please.

Caesura
A pause or break in a poetic line for emphasis, often in the middle of a line.
EXAMPLE: “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” (caesura between “human” and “to forgive”)

Characterization
Using details to add nuance and depth to a character.
EXAMPLE: She seemed distant and uninterested. (Direct characterization)
In response, she grunted unintelligibly and looked away. (Indirect characterization)

Connotation
Any association that readers connect to a word that is different from its literal meaning.
EXAMPLE: Often, mention of a fox carries connotations of cleverness and quickness.

Denotation
The dictionary definition of a word.
EXAMPLE: Fox: A noun referring to a small, carnivorous mammal.

Diction
Use of vocabulary, style, and devices to create a particular impression.
EXAMPLES: “Let us not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments” (elevated)
“I wandered lonely as a cloud” (common)

Flashback
Interrupting the chronological flow of a narrative with an event that occurred at an earlier time.
EXAMPLE: The story of her child’s birth flashed back to the mother’s own childhood.

Foil
A character with contrasting values or abilities to the protagonist.
EXAMPLE: Spock, with his cool detachment, acts as a foil to Kirk’s passionate overconfidence.
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**Foreshadowing**
Hinting at an event in a story that will occur in the future.

  EXAMPLE: Glimpses of Lisa’s murderous tendencies foreshadowed the book’s tragic conclusion.

**Hyperbole**
Using incredible exaggeration or overstatement for emphasis or humor.

  EXAMPLE: I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.

**Imagery**
Using language to evoke a sensory impression or vivid picture in the reader’s mind.

  EXAMPLE: The rain pounded the dark ocean waves as they crashed against the rocky shore.

**Ironic**
Implying a meaning that is the opposite of the actual meaning, for humorous or tense effect.

  Verbal Irony: When a person says one thing but means the opposite.
  EXAMPLE: “Great!” he cried in frustration. “That’s just great!”

  Dramatic Irony: When the reader’s knowledge differs from what the character understands.
  EXAMPLE: As the story neared its climax, I wanted to yell, “Don’t go into that room! Can’t you see it’s a trap?” But the unsuspecting hero had no idea what was coming.

**Metaphor and Simile**
Comparisons between two unlike actions, ideas, or things. Similes use words such as *like* and *as*.

  EXAMPLES: His hair looks *like* a mop. (Simile)
  His hair is a mop. (Metaphor)

**Oxymoron**
The combination of opposite or contradictory terms.

  EXAMPLES: deafening silence, jumbo shrimp, irregular pattern

**Personification**
Giving an object, idea, or animal human feelings, thoughts, or attributes.

  EXAMPLE: The moon smiled down on them.

**Point of View**
The perspective from which a story is told.

  EXAMPLES: Barely conscious, I gasped for air. (First person narration)
  Barely conscious, you gasped for air. (Second person narration [rarely used in academia])
  Barely conscious, the girl gasped for air. (Third person narration)

**Symbol**
A person, place, thing, or event that has meaning in and of itself and also stands for something more.

  EXAMPLES: Sunshine often symbolizes happiness.
  Rain sometimes symbolizes sadness and loneliness. At other times, it has been used to symbolize cleanliness, growth, and renewal of life.

**Understatement**
Intentionally falling short of describing the full extent of a subject, often for humor.

  EXAMPLE: It gets *a little uncomfortable* in the sun on those 115-degree summer afternoons.